

GLOBAL TOURISM AWAITS CHINESE TOURISTS TO RETURN



According to a report by Tourism Economics, global tourism is gradually recovering from the pandemic and is nearing the levels seen in 2019, which were record figures. Despite prolonged restrictions in China, the world's largest tourism market, international travel is expected to reach 86% of pre-pandemic levels in 2023. Meanwhile, leisure travel has already reached 90% of pre-pandemic levels. While the recovery is ongoing, these figures are a positive indication for the industry.

Leisure travel is becoming increasingly popular, accounting for 60% of the total of over 1.26 billion international trips expected this year. France and Spain are the top two countries receiving leisure tourists, with 72.4 million and 70.8 million visits, respectively. Following them are the United States (41.8 million) and Turkey (45.5 million).

After the pandemic, the recovery in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa has been successful, as per experts. The significance of Chinese tourists is notable, as it's the missing piece in the recovery, which leads experts to be optimistic for the following year.

In comparison to 2019, the Middle East witnessed a surge of 13%, which is the highest among all regions. In contrast, Asia Pacific recorded the most significant decline due to China's strict visa restrictions, which were only lifted at the beginning of this year.

Meanwhile, in America and Europe, the current levels are already close to those of four years ago, with a decrease of 4% and 3%, respectively. Saudi Arabia stands out as the country experiencing an enormous boost in tourism, with a remarkable increase of 64%. This positive development can be attributed to the country's openness and the launch of several tourism projects. The report also emphasizes the significant increases in tourism that Albania (43%) and Poland (35%), respectively, have experienced. Additionally, the study predicts substantial growth in Spain and Turkey's tourism sectors by 2024.

The report indicates that the recovery is at risk due to the higher travel costs in the short term. The average price of flights has increased by 36% compared to pre-pandemic levels, while accommodation and holiday packages have increased by 23% and 22%, respectively.

Moreover, there is a persistent problem of labor shortages. In 2019, filling vacancies took an average of 3.5 weeks, but this year, it took an average of five weeks. One of the reasons for this difficulty is the steep increase in housing prices in tourist areas, which makes it less attractive for people to work there.

Tourism experts acknowledge that in some places, the saturation of tourism has become a significant issue that the industry is fully aware of. Tour operators are striving to avoid turning certain sites into theme parks. While tourism is an essential part of the economy, it must be balanced with the needs of residents and destination management. There are ongoing debates about the maximum number of people who can visit some places, and efforts are being made to restrict the number of visitors to such over-tourism destinations.

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